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from Equations

#22

To dwell on that siren call: it isn't really transcendental. It's meant to lift you up, then plonk you back down again (wet or dry, as the case may be). It serves the siren, not you. Trish knows these rules very well, has studied them. Her approach to playing the role is methodical— you give them this much, and then draw back. Not everyone responds to Trish's particular wavelength because it presupposes not just intelligence but artistry. You must be a figure worthy of representation for her to take you seriously. Conversations must shoot up around colors, forms, images. The drunken nights I spend at her studio (white and red wine) are an epiphany. I've never had my mind and body turned on at the same time. Trish knows this; she is going down the checklist. Her postures and gestures are bold and dramatic; when she takes the pins out of her bun and lets her long hair fall down her back, part of me falls, too. It's winter; the studio (three of the four walls being mostly windows) is chilly. I've grown a slight moustache but, at twenty-five, still look boyish. Trish doesn't take my songs or poems seriously; they are unproven, not high enough. My thoughts crave her approval as my body aches for her submission. In this way, we dance. Trish is shrewd; she knows that, with my intense urgency, she must give in (at least once) almost instantly. She likes taking

the superior position and her long torso contrasts neatly with Lisa's petite squatness. But (importantly) she hasn't fallen. She's played her part well; I've fallen alone.

#27

Yet quirks and idiosyncrasies facilitate fluidities— we all like what we like, just as we want what we want. For whatever reason, when I break up with Trish for the first time I fall in love with Sara, who I meet at the Last Drop. Sara is just graduating from the University of the Arts, with a journalism degree. She has a bull neck, big nose, and a massive bust, but for some reason it works for me. Sara likes to leave things up in the air; her equation with sex is oriented around speech. That is, Sara likes to talk about sex more than she likes to have it. She loves the intrigue of conversation, rather than flesh meeting flesh; the sparkle of a public *tete a tete*, rather than actual skin scintillations. I discover this over a period of months, as I am baffled by Sara's behaviors. She moves me compulsively; I always want more of her. The final equation she leaves me with is this: the wanting is sweeter (and sexier) than the having. But there's something I notice amiss in this: Sara's equations are frightened. They presuppose a minimum of experience, and a maximum of insecurity on every conceivable level. My failure to physically penetrate Sara devastates me as much as the collapse of my established relationship with Trish. With Sara begins a life spent in bars. I learn the right way to tip, to stare, to make successful moves over drinks; all those street level skills are a mountain to climb and a primer to master.

#28

New Years' Eve, 2004: I meet Patti at a bar off of South Street. We dance and play the usual touchy-feely games. Somehow the timing isn't right— either she's not interested or I'm too distracted. Months go by and I don't see her; then, I'm

walking, alone, down Pine Street one spring midnight and Patti staggers into me. She's mushy and I can't make out what she's saying but we squish towards each other anyway. It's a nice squish and so we start sort of going out. Patti doesn't drink just sometimes like Sara does; Patti requires drinks. There is something bestial in her soul that only alcohol can conquer. But drinks make you say and do funny things that aren't strictly natural (whereas getting stoned can make things more naturalized) so that Patti and I establish immediately the artificiality of our together equations. Patti likes to speak in tongues, talk gibberish, talk Russian— I humor her. But in our drunkenness I realize that Patti is avoiding completely consummating our relationship. We take walks down side streets in the wee hours and make out and grope against walls; roll in the grass beside the Walnut Street Bridge, my hand in her skirt; but the big caress never happens. Everything has to be drama, everything has to be public, and since we can't have sex in public we might as well not have it at all. Then, she starts to torture me with other barfly guys. This is life in the street; not within reaching distance of the godly, or the diabolical. You make your image what it is, then you are what your image is—that's the basic street equation.

#31

I meet Heather in a bar; I have created a context in which bars are the only place to do social business. Everyone in the arts wants to get drunk; unfortunately, I learn that not everyone in the arts is actually an artist. For every soul that goes up over words, images, or sounds, there are ten souls that lust after praise, glamour, and intrigue. Now I have cohorts that help me do business in the arts. Our business is to recruit artists to perform in one of our shows. Because all of us happen to be males, the competition levels among us over females is intense (we're all more or less straight). When a new woman sits down with us (who may or may not prove to be one of our prize performers), it's off to the races. Heather sits down and Mick happens to be more on the ball than me. Everything he says hits the bull's eye; all his moves lock into Heather's. The exquisite anguish of living in bars; when someone else's moves work and yours don't. What's pitiable

about all of us is that we live in these anguished edges; everything hinges on social contingencies. You watch someone else move in for the kill, and feel your own dryness. Later, this changes; Heather falls for my moves. What I learn is that in this jungle atmosphere, all positive contacts can be useful. Because I don't snap or cock block Mick, Heather becomes someone held in reserve. The problem with all of these levels is that they turn human beings into chess pieces. You can't go up, you can only move around on the board. Bars and street life harden people into rigid postures that are difficult to efface. If you fall in love with this hardness, you become a flush.

Adam Fieled is a poet based in Philadelphia. He has released four print books: *Opera Bufo* (Otoliths, 2007), *When You Bit...* (Otoliths, 2008), *Chimes* (Blazevox, 2009), and *Apparition Poems* (Blazevox, 2010) as well as numerous chaps, e-chaps, and e-books, including *Posit* (Dusie Press, 2007), *Beams* (Blazevox, 2007), and *The White Album* (ungovernable press, 2009). He has work in journals like *Tears in the Fence*, *Great Works*, *The Argotist*, *Upstairs at Duroc*, *Jacket*, on *PennSound*, in the *&Now Awards Anthology* from Lake Forest College Press, and an essay forthcoming in *Poetry Salzburg Review* from University of Salzburg Press. A magna cum laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he also holds an MFA from New England College and an MA from Temple University, where he is completing his PhD.

[previous page](#) [contents](#) [next page](#)

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